



Maine Legislative Youth Advisory Council

ISSUE BRIEF: BULLYING

“Each year, more kids are bullied than the populations of Philadelphia, Columbus and Memphis combined.”

-- Fight Crime: Invest in Kids Maine

INTRODUCTION

Bullying is a form of harassment and anti-social behavior that affects most adolescents regardless of age, race, gender, ability, or family economic status. Defined as being “exposed, repeatedly and over time, to negative actions on the part of one or more other students,”¹ bullying prevents students from enjoying a safe, stress-free learning environment. Students who are bullied report fear of going to school and/or riding the bus, physical symptoms of illness, and lower levels of self-esteem.² Bullies themselves are more likely to engage in criminal behavior and violence when they are older.³

In 1998 the Maine Project Against Bullying (MPAB), a 3-year research-based program funded by the Maine Department of Education began researching the prevalence of bullying in Maine schools. Its primary goal was to assist in implementation of best practices in addressing the problem of bullying among children in Maine schools, grades K-4. Despite such efforts to address bullying, it continues to be prevalent in Maine elementary and high schools. According to the Bully Police, Maine ranked among the top 10 in a state-by-state comparison of the total number of reported cases of bullying that occurred between 2000 and 2003.⁴

FACTS ABOUT BULLYING IN MAINE

The MPAB conducted a survey on bullying of third graders in Maine elementary school in February of 1999. The survey findings reveal the following facts about the extent to which bullying occurs and how children react to bullying:

- On a regular basis, (every day as compared to once or twice a week or month), 22.6% of third graders surveyed said they were threatened, 40.7% were teased in a mean way, 40% were called hurtful names, 34% were left out of things on purpose, and 37.5% were hit, kicked or pushed.
- Of surveyed students confronted with bullying: 91.3% report taking some action in response; 44.3% tell an adult; 34.2% tell the bully to stop; 32% get away from the bully; and 5.9% never told anyone.
- Bullied students reported that when they told someone about the bullying, 48.2% said it got better, while 15.3% said it got worse, and 21.7% said nothing happened.

Though these findings are specific to third graders, research has shown that bullying begins in elementary school, peaks in middle school, diminishes but does not disappear in high school⁵ and if allowed or neglected, it can continue to affect both the bully and the victim for the rest of their lives.

FEDERAL AND STATE LEGISLATION

Since 1999, at least 16 states have passed laws to address harassment, intimidation and bullying in school. The primary goals of almost all these legislative efforts are to define bullying, to establish school or district-level policy that firmly prohibits such behavior, and to communicate that policy to

students and their parents.⁶ Pending legislation before Congress proposes to amend the federal Safe and Drug-Free Schools and Communities Act to include bullying and harassment prevention programs.⁷

In 2005, Governor Baldacci signed into law LD 564, “An Act to Amend the Laws Governing the Student Code of Conduct,” requiring Maine school boards to establish policies to address bullying, harassment and sexual harassment and put such policies in place by September of 2006.⁸ Pursuant to this law, a subcommittee of the Maine Children’s Cabinet developed “Maine’s Best Practice Guide to Bullying and Harassment Prevention”, which offers model policies specific to recognizing and addressing bullying, harassment, and sexual harassment, as well as materials for communicating and implementing such policies.

POLICY QUESTIONS

In thinking about what a state-wide anti-bullying and harassment law or policy should look like, consider the following questions:

- Definitions - What is bullying? Harassment? Violence? How are they similar? How are they different?
- Accountability - Who should be responsible for ensuring that bullying and harassment do not occur in school? Communities? Schools? Teachers? Parents? Students? Law enforcement?
- Enforcement - What kind of punishment is appropriate for bullying? Ignoring an incident? What kind of incentives or rewards could be provided for reporting incidents? How should incidents be tracked or monitored?
- Awareness - Who should be educated about bullying and harassment? What are some ways to raise public awareness about bullying and harassment at school?
- Policy - Should an anti-bullying policy be mandated for all schools in Maine? Should they all be similar or allowed to be different depending on the school? What should be the main components of an anti-bullying policy? Should counseling services, for bullies and victims, be made available at school?

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

Maine’s Best Practices in Bullying and Harassment Prevention: A Guide for Schools and Communities, Maine Governor’s Children’s Cabinet, 2006.

http://mainegov-images.informe.org/cabinet/Bullying_000.pdf

Maine Project Against Bullying

<http://lincoln.midcoast.com/~wps/against/bullying.html>

U.S Department of Education, Student Reports of Bullying 2005

<http://nces.ed.gov/pubs2005/2005310.pdf>

The Bully Police

www.bullypolice.org

Fight Crime: Invest in Kids Maine

<http://www.fightcrime.org/me/index.php>

¹ Olweus, 1991

² Maine Project Against Bullying, <http://lincoln.midcoast.com/~wps/against/bullying.html>

³ Colvin et. al, 1998

⁴ Bully Police USA Report, Survey data submitted since May 2000

⁵ Maine Project Against Bullying, <http://lincoln.midcoast.com/~wps/against/bullying.html>

⁶ 2005 NCSL, School Bullying

⁷ H.R. 284

⁸ P.L. 2005, chapter 307